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THE CHILD IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

In the great mass of critical comment on eighteenth century literature, in the many studies that have been made of the first, misty, half-wistful out-reachings of Romanticism, there has been a curious neglect of a most interesting phase of this many-sided movement — that of the growing consideration of children and childish interests. It is a development, indeed, which should appeal with especial force to this, our latter-day world. To-day our markets are flooded with books for children and about children; the bookdealer fails or succeeds according to his ability to satisfy the demands of the little folk; the aspiring author turns to a ten-year-old public alike for inspiration and patronage; the current magazines sell in proportion to the number of child stories they can boast. Yet no one has paused to trace this current of widespread interest back to its source, which is, quite naturally and properly, to be found in this same romantic movement which had its slender beginnings well back in the eighteenth century.

Previous to the seventeenth century there seems to have been little or no recognition of childhood's legitimate literary demands. As all literary growth is sequential, it will perhaps be of service to take a rapid survey of conditions leading up to the era of general awakening in the eighteenth century.

In the days of bookish scarcity, when materials were dear, and production laborious, it is natural that no books should have been produced for mere pleasure's sake, and that all which were thus painfully given to the children should have served as manuals of instruction, both intellectual and moral. The books of the time, then, fall easily into two classes: (1) books of good counsel; and (2) classical grammars. The former we find, as we might expect, stern and unsympathetic, all written from the lamentably grown-up standpoint expressed in Henry Scogan's lines:

That tyme loste in youthhed jolity,
Greveth a wight bodily and ghostly.

From "The Babees Booke," the reprinting of which is far from being the least of Dr. Furnival's many valuable contributions to literary study, we quote the following "good counsel" for the guidance and edification of the hapless children of long ago:

For as the wise man sayeth and proveth,
A lere child, lore he behoveth;
And as men say that be ler(n)ed,
He hateth the child that spareth the yerde;
And as the wise man saith in his book
Of proverbs and wisdoms,—who will look,—
As a sharp spur maketh a horse to run
Under a man that should war win,
Right so a yerde may make a child
To learn his lessons and to be mild.

The same book, however, proves that even in those dark days there was an occasional gleam of humorous and appreciative understanding. A schoolboy has played truant — as what healthy schoolboy of any date would not, under the above quoted provocation? — has been caught, and in consequence flogged. Therefore, he gives voice, through the medium of a really delightful poem, to many a disrespectful and relentless wish, the final one being altogether too choice to escape frequent quotation, representing as it does, the universal emotions of the universal schoolboy:

I wolde my master were an hare
And all his bookes houndes were,
And I myselfe a Joly hontere;
To blow my horn I wolde not spare,
For if he were dead I wolde not care
What Vayleth me, though I say nay?

About this time, however, as if to show a more cheerful obverse to the period, we find an attempt to alleviate youthful miseries by the introduction of jingling rhymes to facilitate memorization of that eternal bugbear, the Latin grammar. Very likely the rhymes added grateful relish to the dry task. We may be sure, however, that they added nothing to the student's poetical appreciation.

In the Elizabethan Era we find a single writer, who seems to have written with the distinct purpose of reaching childish un-

derstanding. It was Edward Coote, who, though from the modern standpoint, most unpedagogical in method, was still a writer of considerable boyish appeal, as the following lines bear witness:

My child and scholar, take goode heede
Unto the words that here are set,
And see thou do accordingly
Or else be sure thou shall be beat!

As for the rest, in the abundant poetic outpouring of Shakespeare's time, we find no trace of the real boy or girl. There was, it is true, an occasional baby song of rare beauty, such as gentle, melancholy Nicholas Breton gives us in his much disputed "Lullaby," or such as Greene writes under the title of "Sephestia's Song to Her Child;" but we at once recognize these poems merely as convenient vehicles for expressing adult emotions and in no sense inspired by or written for His Majesty the Baby. In the lovable, vital childishness of the period, the child himself had no place. The sixteenth century world was made for lords and ladies, Corydons and Phillydas, Dicks and Joans; but not for rollicking youngsters with their large demands and generous bestowals of hearty life and love. Whenever a feeble attempt was made to picture childhood, the weazened, drawfed little men and women who resulted were indeed pathetic, even when they grew under the master pen of our master Shakespeare, in whose myriad minds there seems to have been no spymathetic comprehension of childhood.

Not only was there no literature in which children figured, but there was none for them. Instead of the psychologic public of to-day which so vigilantly studies childish tastes, and so thoughtfully sugar-coats each bit of knowledge recalcitrant youth must swallow, there was a care-free, conscienceless world of grown-ups, who said to their children, "Don't read, but if read you must, here are a Latin grammar and a Greek lexicon." And with them the sturdy schoolboy had to be content, after he had passed the preliminary coaching of the dame school and the horn book, both of which, we dare to conjecture, were vastly less interesting to him than they are to the student of to-day.

The seventeenth century was as barren in its child literature

as it was in all other respects, and accountably so. It was the era of the Puritan, in whose gloomy conception every irresponsible babe born into the world was inevitably damned and was to be saved from a perpetuation of this mournful fate only by a life of the most rigorous self-abasement and self-denial. One of the best exponents of the age is James Janeway, of unhappy memory, author of "A Looking Glass for Children," and "Tokens for Children," this latter further announcing itself as "An exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives, and joyful deaths of several young children." Attractive enough, is it not? And further investigation convinces us that any of its youthful readers must have preferred eternal gloom to instant salvation of the pale and sickly order portrayed. Yet it was a case of "Take this book or go without." Poor, poor children! The saddest part of the story is that they, too, grew up in the same humorless mould, and for two generations afflicted their children, even as they themselves had been afflicted.

It was this century which produced the ascetic allegory of that Christian visionary, John Bunyan. Not that he wrote for children, but children then and thereafter claimed as their own, a book which attracted them partly through its allegorical medium, and partly through its vivid concrete delineation. One book of verse Bunyan did write, avowedly for young folks, giving it the alarming title of "Divine Emblems, or Temporal Things Spiritualized for the Use of Boys and Girls." In its ludicrous ignorance of the form and content of poetry — in which field, to do him justice, Bunyan makes no claim to proficiency — it affords the only gleam of fun and humor which makes its way through the Puritanic gloom of the century, whose attitude towards its children is well indicated by the title *Nolens Volens*, which Elisha Coles (1640-1680) gives to his Latin Grammar.

With such antecedents, then, the eventful eighteenth century was ushered in, bringing with it, for the first time, a very acceptable glimpse of a sturdy childhood, which sprang up perforce to counteract with its healthy vigor the immorality and artificiality of its contemporary adult period, and to bring sweet, untainted freshness to the early dawn of a new era. Literary activity in behalf of the children was still in control of those who

felt the responsibility of their moral welfare, and we are no whit surprised to find in the lead of the van that most pleasing divine, the brightest "among numerous stars which have adorned the hemisphere of the Christian Church," the very reverend Dr. Watts. Having passed through a most exemplary childhood himself, demanding books before he could talk plainly, studying Latin at the age of four, and shortly thereafter writing Latin pindarics to his teacher, who, pray, had a better right to preach to children? Preach he did, and very acceptably, it would seem. In 1706 he published his *Horæ Lyricæ*, which is known to-day chiefly as the volume which contains the famous warning to the young, "Remember Your Creator." The poem is full of the forceful morality which is aptly expressed by the definitely marked rhythm of this writer of hymns. The first venture was a good one. Idolized by all non-conformists, and urged on by his own restless conscience, he produced his emotional hymns and remarkable Hebrew paraphrases, all in preparation of the first book really to be devoted to children. In 1719, finally, were written the "Divine and Moral Songs for Children." By them, Dr. Watts has been and will be remembered. The book is prefaced by some remarkably unique and impersonal remarks about his own poetry. For instance, he writes: "There is delight in the very learning of truth and duties in this way. There is something so amusing and entertaining in rhymes and meter that will incline children to make this part of their business a diversion. And you may turn their very duty into a reward [so unwise was the learned gentleman in his methods!] by giving them the privilege of learning one of these songs a week if they fulfill the business of the week well, and promising them the book itself, when they have learned ten or twenty songs of it."

However far the good doctor may be from the ideals of the children of to-day, he was the first consciously to seek their level in his own time. "And as I have endeavored," he continues, "to sink the language to the level of a child's understanding, and yet to keep it, if possible, above contempt, so I have designed to profit all, if possible, and offend none." That he deemed himself successful in this laudable undertaking is

evident from the complacent tone in which he later speaks of "these my little composures!"

The verses, themselves, simple and by no means unworthy, are full of delicious and wholly unconscious humor, and their sentiments are fearlessly and ruthlessly expressed with the fervor of a man who preaches well and knows it, and loves the knowledge. The poet scourges vice and exposes shame and scoffs at weakness with all the cheerful vigor of the reformer, bent on the redemption of another's soul. Listen! all ye worldly-minded little girls of to-day!

Why should our garments (made to hide
Our parents' shame) provoke our pride?
The art of dress did ne'er begin
Till Eve; our mother, learned to sin.

How proud we are, how fond to show
Our clothes, and call them rich or new;
When the poor sheep and silk-worm wore
That very clothing long before.

The tulip and the butterfly
Appear in gayer coats than I;
Let me be dressed fine as I will,
Flies, worms, and flowers exceed me still.

Forestalling Oliver Herford and his "Natural History Primer" by nearly two hundred years, Dr. Watts often turns to animals and insects to point his moral lessons. In "The Ant or Emmet," he preserves in doggerel an anapestic measure which his contemporary, Matthew Prior, had a few years earlier made famous in a far different strain. What sombre reflections must this poem have induced in its youthful readers!

Now, now while my strength and my youth are in bloom,
Let me think what shall serve me when sickness shall come,
And pray that my sins be forgiven;
Let me read in good books, and believe and obey,
That when death turns me out of this cottage of clay,
I may dwell in a palace in Heaven!

In the same tripping meter is a hymn even more humorously severe. We all know it:

'Tis the voice of the sluggard, I hear him complain,
You have waked me too soon, I must slumber again.

And as a result of this sloth, follow evils upon evils until

Said I then to my heart, "Here's a lesson for me;
The man's but a picture of what I might be!"

But the dismal thought is finally dissipated by the reflection:

Thanks to my friends for their care in my breeding
Who have taught me betimes to love working and reading.

Is it any wonder that Dr. Johnson, who was never a boy himself, strongly approved of Dr. Watts and declared that any one "who has the care of instructing others may be charged with deficiency in his duty" (note the pompous threat of the words!) "if Dr. Watts be not recommended."

The book is redeemed from a purely humorous aspect in our own more irreligious age, by an occasional stanza of real lyricism and unaffected emotion. There is no more tender cradle hymn than the lovely stanzas beginning, "Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber." With this and a few other verses in mind, it might be a curious and profitable bit of literary labor to read Dr. Watts with an eye to establishing the literary ancestry of some of Wordsworth's simpler verses. It certainly takes very little critical acumen to discern in the independent spirit and untrammelled expression of the slender volume, the germs of that Romanticism which burst into brilliant blossom under the tendance of the Lake Poets.

In amusing contrast to the reverend doctor, we find worldly-minded Matt Prior, who was writing contemporaneously his delightful lyrics and *vers de société* to the noble children of his acquaintance. A not-too-moral trifle in a not-too-moral age, a bit of a scheming politician, very much a hanger-on of the rich and influential men of his time, a poetical forerunner of Keats, a Hudibrastic satirist, a brilliant writer of most perfect society verse — so is Prior known. He would be known much more happily and worthily if his readers would do him the justice to read his few charming poems for children, sympathetic, loving, lovable as they are. His first attempt in this field was in the "Lines to My Young Lord Buckhurst, Playing with a Cat." The verses are thoroughly poetic, though not so good perhaps,

as those to "A Child of Quality, Five Years Old." The poem is exquisite and marks Prior, more surely than any of his other works, as worthy of lasting favor.

"To Lady Margaret Cavendish, When a Child," is another of Prior's good child poems which merits wider recognition than it has usually received:

My noble, lovely, little Peggy,
Let this my first epistle, beg ye,
At dawn of morn and close of even,
To lift your head and hands to heaven.
In double duty say your prayer,
Our Father first,— then *notre pere*.

And dearest child, along the day,
In everything you do or say,
Obey and please my Lord and Lady,
So God shall love and angels aid ye.
If to these precepts ye attend,
No second letter need I send,
And so I rest, your constant friend.

The tribute to the noble, lovely, little Peggy shows her capable not only of inspiring a notable poet to write a notable poem, but also of pricking deep with youthful charms, below the mask of the languid scoffer which Prior habitually wore, and drawing from him a bit of preaching as serious, if not as violent, as Dr. Watts would have written, and one far more aglow with gentle tenderness.

In very different humor he wrote "The Female Phæton," which recommends itself both to the student of the eighteenth century and the lover of children. The poem was written for Lady Catherine Hyde, and pictures her, a little girl, grieving — as what younger sister has not grieved? — over the fact that her older sister is accorded social privileges and triumphs which are not allowed her.

With lines of such whim, social and appreciative insight in mind, it becomes a question, not to be lightly answered, whether Prior did not do quite as much for the child world as did denunciatory Isaac Watts, with his blood-chilling sermons. However we may answer the question, we must at least conclude that

through these so different channels came contributions to the same slowly growing stream of independent, natural thought, which was moving farther and farther away from the artificial classicism of the Popeian school.

Better known than Prior, and less deserving of recognition, is John Gay, who can claim attention here only through a scant handful of verses addressed to the young folks of his acquaintance. Saintsbury, with his usual satiric appreciation and apt epithet, has characterized him as "a human lap-dog," and though he met easy toleration in his own day, as indeed in this, and made many faithful friends, yet we find him so much occupied with his attempt to swim with the current, that we expect little divergence from the accepted and popular poetic standards of his immediate age. Nor do we find it. His few accidental verses for children are in the prevailing heroic couplet, and show no signs in thought or form of the slowly growing classical revolt. Perhaps the best he has to contribute, aside from two or three stereotyped fables "to young noblemen," is the poem "To a Young Lady, With Some Lamphreys," which expresses at once his pleasant cleverness and his habitual impecuniosity. The poem, in its smooth formality and superficial mode of thought, serves well as a contrasting background for the real child literature that was being quietly and unobtrusively developed.

Writing contemporaneously, and in the same artificial strain, yet with a childish simplicity and grace which should have won him more credit, was Ambrose Philips, who is unkindly said to have surpassed his contemporaries in one respect only — that of longevity! From his name, Henry Carey, famous as the author of "Sally in Our Alley" and his one immortal epithet, derived the adjective "Namby-Pamby." Apart from a few delicate juvenile poems, fettered by conventional form, it must be admitted that Philips proved worthy of the word; but, curiously enough, it was these same juvenile poems which our later criticism admits as worthy, that gave origin to the derisive epithet. It was fastened inevitably upon him by Pope, to whom a contemptuous epithet gave more pleasure than anything else, except personal adulation. In any case, Philips certainly merits praise

for graceful verses like those "To Miss Georgiana Carteret."

The lines, though artificial in form, are yet more genuine in thought, and therefore more worthy than those of their censor, Pope, in whose "Rape of the Lock" we find a poem written "only to divert a few young ladies," and taking young folks as its subject. But alas! for the vigorous sermons of Dr. Watts and the morality they were intended to engender. The poem, in its thin shrillness, its lack of genuine feeling and sincere emotion, its unblushing exposure of human vanities, is a typical product, not only of its writer but of its age. It is the work of a man, who, according to M. Taine, "never wrote because he thought, but thought in order to write," and he might have added, never thought at all, except in bitterness. It was the work of an age which stood sponsor for the almost insane development of the artificial couplet. For us in the discussion of our present topic it has only backgrown signification, affording a contrast for the greater illustration of the scattering attempts that were beginning to show genuine childhood in a true light. So considering it, we find it witty, epigrammatic, ingenious — never ingenuous — brilliantly and often maliciously satirical, and silvery sweet in its delicate fantasy. Better than any other product of the age it shows by its artificial treatment of free young life what the rebellious romanticists had to work against.

Omitting the rather entertaining though not very meritorious juvenile poems of the mad poet, Christopher Smart, we find in the middle century, the reading world enraptured with "the first real prose novels," which in their huge bulk and wearisome detail seem to a modern reader both "real" and "prosaic" with a vengeance. However, they shed a somewhat amusing sidelight on our present topic in illustration of which I quote from Mr. Wilbur L. Cross's "Development of the English Novel:"

"It was customary in Richardson's time to read his novels aloud in the family circle. When some pathetic passage was reached, the members of the family would retire to separate apartments to weep; and after composing themselves they would return to the fireside to hear the reading proceed. It was reported to Richardson once that on one of these occasions 'an

amiable little boy' sobbed as if his little sides would burst, and resolved to mind his books, that he might be able to read 'Pamela' through without stopping. That there might be something in the family novel expressly for children, Richardson sometimes stepped aside from his narrative — unity of construction was always happily ignored in his novels — to tell them a moral tale. Here are two companion pieces, clipped of their decorations. There were once two little boys and two little girls, who never told fibs, who were never rude, noisy, mischievous nor quarrelsome; who always said their prayers before going to bed and as soon as they arose. They grew up. The masters became fine gentlemen; and the misses became fine ladies and housewives. There were once three naughty boys who had a naughty sister. They were always quarrelling and scratching and would not say their prayers. They, too, grew up. One of the boys was drowned at sea, and the second turned thief, and the third was forced to beg his bread in a far country. And the naughty girl fell from a tree and broke her arm and died of a fever."

This combination of a moral lesson and a pleasure book found huge favor in the eyes of the children and their directors, with the result that the floodgates of child literature were opened and we get a very noticeably increased number of children's books rapidly put into circulation. In their patronizing spirit and obvious morality our happy children and theorizing parents of to-day would find insuperable objections. That they were acceptable in their own day is an incontrovertible — if to us an inexplicable — fact, to which their remarkable increase bears sufficient testimony. Among the most notable writers of these moral tales we find one Thomas Day, whose name is familiar to many of us as the pious author of "Sanford and Merton," a book of prudential and egoistic morality beyond comment. Benevolent and possessed of a fortune to make benevolence practical, Mr. Day spent his early life in study, continental travel, and philanthropic investigation and giving. Returning to England, he spent several years "in a search for a suitable partner in life." Having found one to his liking and having been rudely jilted by her, he fell into a pronounced disaffection for fashionable society, and applied himself to writing a book which should

give expression to his "spleen." Rightfully assuming that one must make appeal to the rising generation if any reform is to be accomplished, Mr. Day addressed himself in "Sanford and Merton" to the children, and in the person of his own Mr. Barrow, he delivers pompous opinions, and gives forth moral precepts of impressive weight and dignity. The book was characterized in its own generation, as "a book replete with information, and of unimpeachable morality." Both statements are undoubtedly true. We can understand, also, how it must have served its purpose of salving the wounded pride and dignity of the rejected lover. It is less easy to appreciate the source of its fascination for healthy children, who, to a large degree unmoral in their early years, have yet a voracious appetite for tangible and concrete morality in their story-books. At any rate, the book was successful in its day, and has remained so through several succeeding generations; the present writer, herself, having a grateful recollection of many fascinated hours spent in its irreproachable company. For the satisfaction of the curious we may add that the author did not remain in his condition of social animosity, but, after having tried some interesting experiments in the effort suitably to mate himself, he married — so happily as to restore his social equilibrium — a wife whose conduct at his death attests her devotion. We are told that after her husband's decease, Mrs. Day never again looked upon the sun, but lay in a bed whose curtains were never drawn, and walked in her garden only at night. Our biographer adds naively that several years later she died of a broken heart.

Much influenced by Mr. Day was another writer for children, Miss Maria Edgeworth, whose father was a constant and devoted companion of the author of "Sanford and Merton." Choosing subjects equally lugubrious and "moral," Miss Edgeworth wrote several books of "Moral Tales" and "Popular Tales" for little children, their principal departure from earlier attempts being in their conversational form and in their laudable efforts to use a vocabulary natural and comprehensible to her readers. Hers was the most successful "primer" work done in the latter years of the eighteenth and first years of the nineteenth century; and while we can only gasp in bewilderment over some of her

discussions of death and eternity and original sin, we can and do recognize her effort — as yet unusual — to study the capacity and intellectual range of the children for whom she wrote.

Mrs. Barbauld — now known only for her famous apostrophe to "Life" — was attempting, less successfully, similar work, as also was Hannah More in her more advanced "Essays for Young Ladies." In other words, the eyes of the closing century were opened to the legitimate demands of the children for suitable books, and the seeds sown so long since by Dr. Watts were coming to their tardy fruition.

A yet more healthy phase of this element of the Romantic development was represented first by John Newberry of blessed memory, and later by Charles and Mary Lamb. Upon the work of Newberry, the children's publisher, who devoted himself to putting upon the market such delectable classics as "Goody-Two-Shoes," we must refrain from comment, since his contribution to this and other literary fields is of too great significance to allow compression into so brief a sketch. Suffice it to say that his seems to be the most natural and appreciative understanding of children that the century produced, and that his efforts to propagate healthful juvenile literature should enhalo him in the minds of happy children and their lovers.

It is much easier to speak of the limited contributions to our subject made by the gentle Elia — "that good Samaritan turned humorist" — and in his work in the first years of the new century we find the best justification of the struggle of the old. We read of his writing in "righteous rage" to Coleridge about "Mrs. Barbauld's and Mrs. Trimmer's nonsense." Let us quote his own indignant words: "Knowledge, insignificant and vapid as Mrs. Barbauld's books convey, must, it seems, come to a child in the shape of knowledge, and his empty noddle must be turned with conceit of his own powers when he has learned that a horse is an animal, and that Billy is better than a horse, and such like; instead of that beautiful interest in wild tales which made the child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a child."

Acting upon the positive theory suggested in his vigorous denunciation, he proceeded to write in 1806, in conjunction with

his sister Mary, a very delightful little book for children called "Mrs. Leicester's School." This he followed in 1827 with the "Tales From Shakespeare." The books, as everyone knows, are to the full, as gentle-spirited and human-hearted as are his essays for adults; and in them we find for the first time, literature for children placed upon its proper level of dignity and simplicity and childishness. It appears not too difficult to connect this slow growth throughout the eighteenth century with the generally recognized Romantic movement, which consists, after all, in nothing more than a recognition of genuine sentiment as opposed to superficial technicality. "Man is a point that flies with two wings: one is thought; the other, love," says Victor Hugo. The Elizabethans were crippled because their flight was winged by love alone; the Augustans, because they poised on thought alone. It was the work of Romanticism to equalize and harmonize the two, and hence to perfect the flight of the spirit. This equalization resulted in a restrained communism which recognized at once the power of the individual egoist and the rights and worth of altruistic demands. So we have a new spirit of liberty, a new sense of brotherhood, a reverence for democratic ideals, an awakening love of nature, an assimilation of the literature of other nations — Gaelic or Norse or what not, all springing from the addition of natural sentiment to the polished intellect of the earlier decades. "Love, and do, it matters not what," writes St. Augustine. And it seems a most natural result that this growing sentiment for sincerity and charity and open-heartedness in politics and thought and life should find instinctive expression in increased care for and service to the *little* children of men.

So the eighteenth century, with its tentative, uncertain, half-timid efforts, led the way to the nineteenth century, which centered its best thought and tenderest care around its young, believing with the Master of old, that a little child shall lead, even in things literary. Without Dr. Watts, Thomas Day, and Maria Edgeworth, in spite of the ludicrous aspect their works sometimes assume, there could not have been the stirring novels and romances of Scott, which have delighted the hearts of so many school-boys and girls. "I just love his romantics," ex-

claimed one of the latter. So do we all. Nor are we ashamed to own it, because it is to dear, genial Sir Walter that we pay our tribute, in the pleasant knowledge that he never did and never can grow up and away from his lovable, enthusiastic, breathless boyishness! Who shall say that the modern world's psychologic and literary turning to its boys and girls has not done, and will not do, more than any other existing tendency to point the way we are so blindly seeking to the "hidden country of the Heart's Desire," where "the hand of the Lord shall wipe away the tears from all the faces?"

WINIFRED SNOW.

Richmond Hill, Long Island.